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EDITOR'S NOTE

Working Alongside Dr. Google

"I have steadily endeavored to keep my mind free so as to give up any hypothesis ... as soon as facts are shown to be opposed to it."

— Charles Darwin

We are always confronted with a quest for the right answer for our patients, knowing that we may not have all the necessary facts at our disposal—as facts require tests and tests cost money. We are also confronted by pet owners who want to know if they are doing the best for their “family member,” unfortunately often trusting sources that are less than reliable. We are never going to stop this, and in some cases we should encourage it, as the pet owner is simply doing all they can to actively support and care for their companion animal. However, we are all too aware of the frustration that can come from questions, suggestions, and advice gained from sources that only serve to impede the best interests of the patient. The same concerns can arise in our own search for information—we may have outdated books or work in small teams with limited resources. Obviously, we have limitless access to Dr. Google, but how do we know what sites we should turn to and what sites should we advise our clients to access?

A recent owner-based survey in the U.K. investigated the information resources used by dog owners and their perceptions of veterinary surgeons' and dog breeders' knowledge.¹ The results indicated that most owners conducted research before getting a dog, with the internet, books, breeders, and friends or family among the most popular resources used. Concerningly, but of

limited surprise, pedigree dog owners perceived veterinary surgeons and breeders to be equally knowledgeable on canine inherited diseases. To positively affect this problem, we need to acknowledge the issue and to be active in advising reliable sources.

But what sources do we use and trust? Our peer-reviewed journals are an obvious source. But in the heat of the moment, we don't often remember where we read the dose of a certain drug or the risks of surgery in a specific disease. Add to this that veterinarians of younger generations are more likely to turn to online sources,² and it's clear that we need credible information presented on various channels to suit individual preferences. Another recent study looked at the use of online resources by students when faced with an internal medicine challenge.² Random internet searches were the preferred method of clarifying queries, except for graduate-entry students and those in the age categories 18 to 21 years and 28 years and over, who still preferred traditional textbooks. Despite over 70% of participants not automatically trusting information from online sources, only 47% fact checked the information. The conclusion made was that however unsurprising it is to find out that online resources now play a big part in veterinary education, a level of academic oversight may be required to ensure appropriate and effective use of these resources.

As we gain experience and insight in the profession, it is critical that we use this knowledge to vet resources and provide guidance for colleagues and clients. Take the time to seek out credible resources, fact check them, and have them ready to recommend on cue. It's imperative that we not only understand and accept the reality of our clients' and colleagues' information-seeking preferences but also use this knowledge to prepare and better serve animals. **TVP**

¹Kuhl CA, Dean R, Quarmby C, Lea RG. Information sourcing by dog owners in the UK: resource selection and perceptions of knowledge. *Vet Rec.* 2022;190(10):e1081. doi:10.1002/vetr.1081

²Bevis AJR, Saadeh K, Tse G, Jeevaratnam K. Exploring UK veterinary students' use of online resources as a tool for studying small animal internal medicine. *Vet Rec.* 2022;e1799. doi:10.1002/vetr.1799